

## 224 SIMILE ZOLA, NOVELIST AND EEFOEMER

The next work which Zola took in hand was "L'QEuvre," the most autobiographical of all his novels, and one for which he had no need to collect documents, for his materials were stored away in his memory. A little of his hypochondria had now returned to him, and the writing of "Germinal" having compelled him to give some attention to politics, he did not cease to rail at politicians. At the "Henriette Mare"chal" anniversary dinner (May 6,1885) he made quite a *sortie* against them, declaring that they were the sworn foes of literary men, in which opinion Edmond de Goncourt cordially agreed. About that time "L'Assommoir" was revived as a play, and at a dinner given at the Maison Dore'e to celebrate the event, Zola turned from the politicians to rate some of the young authors of the time, their alacrity of speech, and on the other hand their unwillingness to take the trouble of writing, unless they were positively assured of publication. One of these young men, said Zola, would expound an idea that had come to him, depict in glowing terms all the interest which such or such a book would have, and then conclude coldly: " Ah.! if a publisher would only order it of me!" For young men of that stamp there was no question of striving. They would work to

order or not at all. Thus literature was becoming a mere commercial pursuit.

On May 22, 1885, France lost her great poet, Victor Hugo. He had been sinking for some time; nevertheless the news that he was really dead quite startled Paris. During his last illness he had declined the ministrations of "any priest of any religion," and the announcement that he would be buried without rites or prayers angered the Church party exceedingly, and led to unseemly scenes in the Chamber of